

Panel set up to advise govt on transboundary pollution

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International slate of legal experts is led by S Jayakumar and Tommy Koh

AN international advisory panel, headed by local legal luminaries S Jayakumar and Tommy Koh, has been formed to provide legal advice to the government on matters related to transboundary pollution.

Minister for the Environment and Water Resources Vivian Balakrishnan told Parliament yesterday that the International Advisory Panel on Transboundary Pollution would study and advise the government on the trends and developments in international law relating to transboundary pollution.

It will also advise the government on the issues arising under international law from the impact of transboundary pollution, as well as on the related solutions and practical steps that Singapore can adopt.

In his Committee of Supply speech, Dr Balakrishnan revealed that the establishment of the panel would help Singapore better deal with the "transboundary environmental impact of actions of other countries", including the haze from forest fires in Indonesia.

"At the International Conference on Transboundary Pollution organised by NUS's Centre for International Law last month, legal experts agreed that clearer international rules, effective institutions and strong cooperation mechanisms were needed to address transboundary pollution. As such, the government has decided to appoint the advisory panel."

Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean, who is also chairman of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Climate Change and Coordinating Minister for National Security, has appointed Prof Jayakumar and Prof Koh to co-chair the panel, which will comprise legal experts from Singapore and abroad.

The composition of the panel will be finalised and made known in due course. Dr Balakrishnan said that the panel would submit its recommendations, including the options available to Singapore under international law, later this year.

Besides this, the ministry will also be implementing stricter water-efficiency measures for industries in addition to households. Dr Balakrishnan revealed that the ministry would mandate the Water Efficiency Management Plans (WEMPs) by all large water users.

"With effect from June 2015, companies consuming 5,000 or more cubic metres of water each month are to install private water meters within their premises and submit their WEMPs annually to PUB," he announced.

He explained that the requirement, which applies to large water users initially, will be progressively expanded to others, but pointed out that government help would be available to the industries.

"To support these large users, PUB had enhanced the Water Efficiency Fund (WEF) in March 2013. Up to 90 per cent of the cost for water audits and meter installation, subject to a maximum cap of \$30,000, can now be co-funded by the WEF. With mandatory WEMP submissions, PUB will also be enhancing the WEF to better support companies on efforts such as recycling or use of alternative sources of water."

Dr Balakrishnan also announced yesterday steps taken by the ministry to encourage more diesel vehicles to be taken off the roads in a bid to improve air quality here.

The Early Turnover Scheme, introduced last April to encourage the early replacement of old diesel commercial vehicles with less pollutive Euro V models, will be enhanced with effect from today as the COE bonus for light commercial diesel vehicles will be doubled to 20 per cent of the remainder of the vehicle's 20-year lifespan.

The amount will be more than tripled from 30 per cent to 100 per cent for heavy commercial diesel vehicles.

"With these initiatives and other measures we put in place, I am optimistic that we will be able to achieve our 2020 targets for air quality," Dr Balakrishnan said.

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